

17 February, 2022

Dear Wardens and Clergy in the Diocese of Calgary:

Changes are happening rapidly in the provincial response to COVID-19 and the guidance now being provided for churches and other sectors is minimal. We do know that as of February 9, capacity limits have been removed, masking is still mandatory for people 13 years of age and up, and that distancing between families, although not mandatory, is to be encouraged. There is no guidance on coffee hours for churches specifically, but from other sections of the guidance, we know that indoor social gatherings are still limited to 10 people and that workplace socials are still not permissible. This would seem to indicate that coffee hours are not possible at this point. There is no limit on the number of youth and children involved in social activities.

Much of this is likely to change as of March 1. For the time being, it is recommended that in our in-person gatherings, we follow the guidance that is provided and make responsible decisions for the protocols to be followed that make sense in the local context. In making responsible decisions, the following should be noted:

- Masks are still mandatory (except for children under 13).
- Choir and congregational singing is permissible (wearing masks).
- Capacity limits have been eliminated for worship.
- Distancing between families is still encouraged. Provision should be made for individuals and families who prefer physical distancing.
- Registration for services is not necessary.
- Communion should continue to be distributed using the practice of priestly intinction, or in one kind only.
- Coffee hours should not resume, at least until the province enters the next stage of removing restrictions.

Parishioners should be reminded to take possible COVID symptoms seriously. They should not attend in-person gatherings if they have, "just a runny nose, sore throat or a little cough." They should not be pressured to attend church if they are not feeling well, and should be encouraged to utilize an online option; there are still several available across the diocese if not available in your parish.

Parishes should give consideration to reducing restrictions gradually, particularly in places where the sudden changes could lead to increased anxiety among parishioners.

Although hospitalization numbers are starting to decrease, it should be noted that the current levels of hospitalizations are still significantly higher than was encountered in any of the previous waves. We have a long way to go before we return to normal in terms of the impact on healthcare workers and services.

Yours in Christ,
The COVID-19 Task Force